

GONORRHEA

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease caused by bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

Who gets gonorrhea?

Anybody who has unprotected sex can be infected with gonorrhea. Pregnant women who are infected with gonorrhea can also infect their newborns during delivery.

People who are already infected with gonorrhea can introduce the bacteria into multiple body sites by:

1. Auto-inoculation (e.g., infected vaginal discharge into a woman's rectum).
2. Self-inoculation (e.g., urethral or vaginal discharge transferred by hand to the eyes through poor hygiene.).

What are the symptoms?

In **women**, the most common manifestations include vaginal discharge, dysuria (pain or burning upon urination), and inter-menstrual uterine bleeding. Signs and symptoms may be difficult to assess because of a coexisting infection with chlamydia, trichomoniasis, candidiasis, gardnerella, or other organisms. In **men**, symptoms may include a profuse penile discharge usually with painful and frequent urination. The head of the penis may become swollen and sore. Both men and women may experience asymptomatic (without symptoms) infections.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The average incubation period is 2 to 7 days, but may range from 0-30 days. **Men** who are infected may have no symptoms and may not believe that they are infected. Most **women** who are infected have no symptoms. Most women who develop local symptoms do so within 10 days of infection.

How long can an infected person spread the bacteria?

The period of communicability may extend for months in untreated individuals.

How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made by gram stain of discharges, by bacteriologic culture on selective media, or by other tests.

What is the treatment for gonorrhea?

Antibiotics are normally used to treat gonococcal infections.

What are the complications of untreated gonorrhea?

Untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and permanent problems. In **men**, it can move from the penis up to the prostate gland, bladder or testicles and cause conditions such as epididymitis (inflammation of the testicles), prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate), and result in a subsequent risk of infertility. In **women**, the most common complication is Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). Women who have PID are at risk of suffering from infertility or from experiencing an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy, which can be a life-threatening condition.

Disseminated Gonococcal Infection (DGI), a rare systemic complication, is more common in women than in men. In most cases, bacteremia probably begins 7 to 30 days after infection; in about half of women with DGI, the onset of symptoms occurs within 7 days following menstruation. DGI is a serious condition that may require hospitalization.

How can the spread of gonorrhea be stopped?

Some general guidelines apply:

- You can reduce your risk of getting gonorrhea by not having sex with anyone or by having sex with only one uninfected partner who has sex only with you.
- Regular examinations for sexually transmitted diseases are advised when unprotected sex is practiced.
- Patients should avoid sexual intercourse until therapy is completed by both themselves and their sexual partners to minimize the risk of reinfection.

Individuals should seek medical treatment when symptoms are present, even if they are mild symptoms.

Where can I get more information?

1. Your personal doctor.
2. Your local health department listed in the telephone directory.
3. The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191.

**UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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